

2008 Year-end letter by John and Mary Lou Tanton

AT YEAR'S END 2008

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying."

To the Virgins to Make Much of Time,
Robert Herrick [1591-1674].

We marked some milestones in 2008, most importantly our 50th year of marriage. Through some combination of good luck and forbearance, we made it to the half century mark (not the bicentennial as I once erroneously styled it!). We had a nice family gathering centered around Mackinaw City. We were especially pleased to have our exchange student daughter from 1972-73, Alexandra Vassiliou, and her husband, George Steinhauer, visit us from Greece. Our Dutch exchange student friends, the Vreugdenhils, who now live in West Virginia, also joined us.

Another milestone was the 40th anniversary of living in our home, which has both been such a pleasant platform for projects and refuge from them through the years. Mary Lou keeps plugging away at her Scenic Michigan organizational work, with their hope of restraining the spread of billboards. She received the well-deserved President's Award from the Michigan Association of Planning this year. She continues to work on Dark Skies, and related lighting and sign concerns. Note the cover article of *National Geographic*, November 2008, "The End of Night: Why We Need Darkness."

We continue to enjoy our little cottage on Douglas Lake north of here. It is located at the end of the road and in the midst of several thousand acres of University of Michigan Biological Station property. Family and friends also use it; it is very pleasant refuge, just 35 miles from our home. We had a fine dose of color and sunsets out there this fall and, of course, the loons' haunting calls. The night skies are very dark and great for star gazing.

Despite the old saying of the wife whose husband had recently retired that she "married him for better or worse, but not for lunch!", Mary Lou and I do have a chance to lunch together on occasion. We both have offices for our outside projects in downtown in Petoskey, and really enjoy the compact nature of the downtown district. There are restaurants, banks, libraries, bookstores, clothing stores, and so on, all within easy walking distance. It is very pleasant, and we can park all day for no charge just a block from the office!

I continue to poke away at my language and immigration concerns. We expect a harder time this year, as problems that are left to fester unaddressed in earlier and more amenable stages, just get worse if unresolved. I helped pull together the 32nd "Writers' Workshop" in Washington last fall, where many of the folks concerned with these problems gather for an annual face-to-face, much needed in this computer age. It is important to look one another in the eye, shake a hand, and break some bread together.

We helped to relocate the North Country Trail through Petoskey's backyard last summer. You may recall from our letter last year that the trail runs from New York State to North Dakota, 4,600 miles in all. Walking from east to west, the stretch we worked on this summer provides hikers their first view of Lake Michigan, from a nice elevated platform, several hundred feet above the lake level. It is spectacular.

Mary Lou still plies me with the date bars made from my mother's recipe of many years. They are very tasty and fondly remembered. She continues to make grape jam from the vines we planted years ago, and this year baked Concord grape pies.

Mary Lou had her 55th high school class reunion this past summer. It was quite an enjoyable event. I had mine last year, at which we made two important resolves: first, to meet every three years instead of five (guess why!). Second, to meet at noon rather than in the evening ... so we could see to drive home! Ah, the wisdom of age

I had my first encounter with a deer while driving through the streets of Petoskey this past summer. One-thousand dollars for a new grill!

We both try to stay in some semblance of shape with a set of floor exercises that we have done together for many years, usually about twice a week. In addition, Mary Lou attends an aerobics dance class three times weekly, and I have three-times a week session with her instructor, a former Michigan State University gymnast, who is trying to help me evade the ravages of my Parkinson's disease ... mainly stiffness and weakness. It is going pretty well, everything considered. The worst part is my loss of legible handwriting. It is called "micrographia." Micro meaning small; graphia meaning writing. No more brief notes in my hand. I have a voice-activated computer that works quite well.

We have become quite devoted to a Sunday evening TV program on PBS called "The Prime Minister's Questions." The British Prime Minister appears in the House of Commons to answer very vigorous questioning. Great fun. Perhaps we should add a session like this to our government routine.

Mary Lou and I still enjoy our breakfast discussion groups, which meet one day a week from 7:00 – 8:00 a.m. They have been going on for more than 30 years now. We also have a longer discussion session called the Second Saturday Salon, which

meets – appropriately enough – on the second Saturday of each month from 9:30 a.m. until noon. Participants report and discuss what they have been reading, and then for the second half, one of us presents on a timely topic. About 20 persons attend these stimulating sessions.

Earlier this past summer, we had the pleasure of hosting the ProEnglish Board of Directors meeting in Petoskey. It was attended by board members from around the country. Our Website address is proenglish.org. While you are at it, you might like to check out johntanton.org and fairus.org.

I write this on the 20th of November, a day after our daughter Jane's husband, Hugh Thomson, closed out his career with General Motors (formerly called Generous Mother by the employees). He was an engineer, and had survived all the previous cuts. They offered him an early-out package he thought best to take. That same day automotive executives were appearing in front of Congressional Committees with their requests for billions of dollars of aid. Jane is a 20-year veteran RN at the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor. Seniority is comforting in times like these.

Florida son-in-law, John de Olazarra, is completing his green building (LEED) certification. He's in the commercial real estate business. Daughter Laura is working toward her Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) credentials. Granddaughter, Olivia, 8 years of age, markets her eco-bead bracelets and necklaces featuring shells, soon to be available at oliviasecobeads.com. She just made \$160.00! John Xavier, our very lively 4-year old grandson, loves his pre-school activities, examining leaves and insects, and the water park.

Mary Lou has taken quite an interest in birds, and we now have a steady visitation of many species around our feeders, especially since the nearby trees have grown up a bit and provide more shelter for them.

When we moved into our house in 1968, the land on which it was built had been pasture for many years, and there were very few trees. By just leaving it alone, trees grew up so densely in the intervening 40 years that we lost our view of Little Traverse Bay. So we started a gentle program of selective removal to help reopen the view, but still keep enough "cover" for the bird population ... doubtless we are thereby doing our part to promote global climate change by returning the felled trees to carbon dioxide and water from whence they came.

We still like to garden, though we now have some help where we did it mostly by ourselves before. We had a good peach crop again this year, along with the other garden and flower goodies. Mary Lou's peach jam ... yummy! We have a little enclosure to keep the deer out of one area, and there we have a nice crop of kale and collards. These will last for some months after the first of the year.

Working in the garden in the spring and fall, we occasionally hear a strange faint sound very high overhead, and realize that it is the sand hill cranes, either on their way north to breed at the Seney Wildlife Refuge in the Upper Peninsula, or are on their way back south for the winter. It is one of the many great sounds in nature.

As I'm sure with all grandparents, our grandchildren are a particular delight. They often phone, and we have set up a Skype system so we can see each other over the computer screen. It works well.

One thing we did this year on the immigration question is to run a series of ads in the major newspapers and magazines around the country trying to stimulate some thoughtful consideration of the question rather than just emotional reactions. I enclose copies of a couple of them. If you'd like to see the full series (there are six altogether), just let me know.

We're still in the beekeeping business, though one of our two hives died out last winter. To replace them, we bought two hives that were well along towards building up the number of bees for the summer honey-gathering season. Interestingly enough, both hives had been shipped earlier in the year from Michigan to California to pollinate almond crops, and then shipped all the way back to Traverse City, Michigan, where we picked them up.

That's about it, on to our next half century together! We hope this finds you well and engaged.

John and Mary Lou